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ABSTRACT

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is a national voluntary organization dedicated to giving adults in the United Kingdom access to organized learning. In a response to the British government green paper "The Learning Age," the WEA outlined its positions regarding lifelong learning and its recommendations regarding increasing the following groups' access to organized learning: educationally disadvantaged adults; unemployed people; parents/caregivers of young children; residents of socially deprived urban and rural areas; members of ethnic communities; frail elderly; adults with learning difficulties/disabilities; prisoners; adults with physical disabilities; adults recovering from mental illness; caregivers of adults with physical or mental disabilities; refugees; trade unionists; and members of community-based organizations. The following issues were emphasized: ensuring equality of opportunity of access to provision; providing appropriate educational guidance; valuing quality of learning through identification of learning outcomes; and developing progression routes and learning pathways. Six case studies were presented to illustrate the following strategies for improving access to organized learning: strong base in local communities; effective partnerships with other community-based agencies; effective links with statutory bodies; flexible and innovative approaches to learning, evaluation of learning, and assessment; recognition of all types and levels of learning; and increased use of new technologies in education. (MN)

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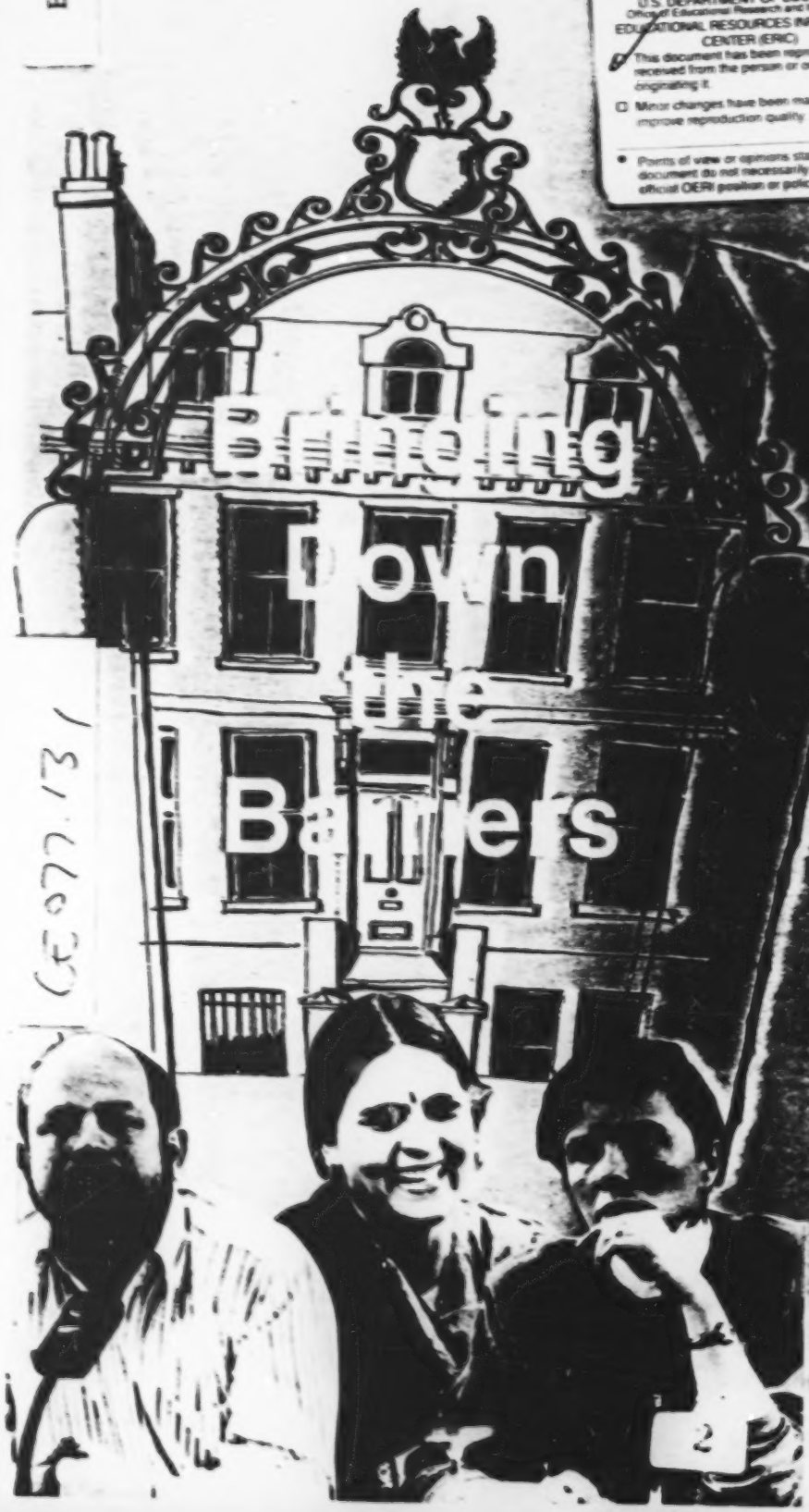

First WEA Submission to *'The Learning Age'* Consultation

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Bringing Down the Barriers

This document is produced by the WEA as a first response to the Government's Green Paper, *The Learning Age*.

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April 1998

The WEA in Summary

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is a national voluntary organisation existing primarily to provide adults with access to organised learning, designed to develop their intellectual understanding, confidence and social and collective responsibility.

The WEA was founded in 1903, and is a registered charity; it is non-party in politics and non-sectarian in religion. Its charitable aims and objectives include:

- "providing in particular for the needs of working class adults and of those who are socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged", and,
- "generally furthering the advancement of education to the end that all children, adolescents and adults may have full opportunities of the education needed for their complete individual and social development."

Learning Together

The WEA is one national association in England and Scotland, organised into 13 Districts in England and the Scottish Association. It has over 650 local Branches, meeting the educational and training needs of more than 100,000 adult students each year. 28 national organisations with an interest in adult and workers' education are affiliated to the WEA at national level.

The WEA is a designated institution under the FHE Act 1992 for funding from the FEFC for both Schedule 2 and non-Schedule 2 provision. Its annual income in England is in excess of £14m of which 40% is derived from FEFC recurrent funding.

The WEA Approach to Learning

Particular features of the WEA's approach to learning include:

- Valuing and making use of students' life experience
- Involving students in organising provision and planning their own learning
- Targeting students who have benefited least from the education system and from opportunities for further and higher education
- Collaborating with other organisations and agencies to meet the needs of adult learners for educational guidance, equal access to provision, and for relevant, progressive and accredited learning opportunities
- Offering high quality learning experiences underpinned by regular monitoring and evaluation of the programme

- Providing staff development opportunities for professional staff and training for voluntary members

- Promoting and supporting the voluntary movement by which the Association governs itself and decides its future strategy.

The WEA and Lifelong Learning

The WEA believes that its distinctive characteristics which combine:

- a learner-centred approach to learning and teaching

- a commitment to social purpose and democratic processes of organisational management and governance

- recognition of the value of partnerships with statutory bodies and providers, and voluntary and community organisations

make it well placed to contribute decisively to the achievement of a Learning Society.

The WEA believes that a Learning Society will only be achieved if Lifelong Learning values in equal measure:

- Learning for economic renewal, thereby improving Britain's international competitiveness and securing labour market expansion

- Learning for social cohesion, thereby affirming the positive contribution which all Britain's citizens can make to the creation of a fair and just society

- Learning for cultural renewal, thereby recognising that the quality of life is not simply dependent upon material factors

- Learning for self-fulfilment, thereby stimulating people's capacity to seek personal growth in ways which meet their individual needs.

WEA is proud of its unique style of teaching and learning, and is promoting the use of the latest technology to facilitate effective learning

The WEA and 'The Learning Age'

The WEA welcomes warmly the publication of the Government's Consultation Document, 'The Learning Age', and is especially heartened by the Secretary of State's 'Foreword'. It believes that his words constitute a genuinely visionary statement which deserve to command support from all who share a commitment to Lifelong Learning.

As the major voluntary provider of adult education in Britain, the WEA applauds the inclusivity of 'The Learning Age'. The Consultation Document recognises that partnership in learning must involve the contribution of the social partners, of statutory institutions and voluntary and community organisations, and of learning institutions and individual learners. If the ambitions of the Government are to be achieved, attention must focus on all routes into learning which motivate and engage adults, particularly those whose first formal educational experiences were either limited or negative.

The WEA recognises that implicitly and explicitly 'The Learning Age' addresses the agendas of the Tomlinson, Kennedy and Fryer Reports which together have argued for priority to be given to those who are most disadvantaged in our society, be it for economic, social, cultural or educational reasons. The WEA supports the view that it is the learning needs of these groups which should be the major focus of Government Lifelong Learning initiatives. This may require the Government to combat institutional privilege and prejudice: what cannot be accepted is for public policy to be driven exclusively by the needs of those institutions who serve the upper end of the labour market. In turn this would imply that, within an environment of limited resources, 'widening participation' in Lifelong Learning will only be advanced through the progressive redistribution of available resources allied to policies and practices which aim to bring down the barriers to participation.

This first WEA Submission to 'The Learning Age' Consultation focuses on breaking down barriers to participation.

Working Together

The Barriers to Participation

The WEA endorses the view expressed in 'Learning for the Twenty-First Century' (the Fryer Report) that learners from under-represented groups typically face the following barriers to effective participation in learning:

- Shortage of money for course fees and related expenses
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of outreach provision
- Lack of tutorial support when studying
- Lack of personal support
- Courses organised at inappropriate times and in inaccessible places

Both the Fryer Report and 'The Learning Age' throw down a challenge to institutions and agencies to examine how their own practices support or obstruct access to Lifelong Learning for all. 'The Learning Age' offers a valuable checklist of what institutions can do to make it easier for people to learn (paragraph 1.5). The WEA is not

complacent about the size of the task before it. However, the WEA believes that it has valuable experiences which can be shared with others on effective practices which do open up access to under-represented groups (see pages 8 to 15 of this Submission).

Under-Represented Groups

The WEA recognises that there are dangers to a broad brush categorisation of under-represented groups. Nonetheless, it feels passionately that its commitment to social purpose in its learning activities requires it to determine target student groups based on economic, social, cultural and educational disadvantage. It is instructive to note how the WEA's list of target groups, agreed in Autumn 1996, compares to the Fryer list:

Working with Women

'Learning for the Twenty-first Century'

- Unskilled manual workers
- Part-time and temporary workers
- People without qualification
- Unemployed people
- Some groups of women - notably lone parents, and those on the lowest incomes
- Those living in remote or isolated locations
- Some ethnic and linguistic minority groups
- Older adults
- People with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- People with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties
- Ex-offenders
- Disaffected young adults, and notably young men

WEA Target Student Groups

- Educationally disadvantaged adults
- Unemployed people
- Parents/carers of young children
- Residents of socially deprived urban and rural areas
- Members of ethnic communities
- Frail elderly
- Adults with learning difficulties/ disabilities

- Prisoners
- Adults with physical disabilities
- Adults recovering from mental illness
- Carers of adults with physical or mental disabilities
- Refugees
- Trade unionists
- Members of community-based organisations

Although the identification of precise learning needs will be different between and within under-represented groups there remain a number of common approaches which require comprehensive application. Again, the checklist of what institutions could and should do to make it easier for people to learn is helpful here ('The Learning Age', paragraph 1.5). Also it should be recognised, as the Fryer Report has argued, that institutions should incorporate inclusive definitions of learning, which reflect the variety and diversity of needs and motivations.

Some barriers to participation can be overcome with relative ease, others will require substantial commitment against clearly defined targets and may have important implications for the allocation and deployment of resources.

Within the last four years, the WEA has recognised the vitally important contribution to widening participation that can be achieved from a more rigorous approach to its educational processes. In particular, attention has focused on four areas of activity:

- Ensuring equality of opportunity of access to provision
- Providing educational guidance
- Valuing the quality of learning through the identification of learning outcomes
- Developing progression routes and learning pathways

Work in these areas is by no means complete, but already there is clear evidence of both improvement in the quality of learning and wider participation in the learning opportunities the WEA offers.

Helping in Schools

Ensuring Equality of Opportunity of Access to Provision

The WEA believes that access to organised learning is a right that should be enjoyed by everyone, but appreciates that many adults face barriers to their participation. These include financial restrictions, physical or mental disability or previous poor experiences of education. The WEA actively seeks to help overcome these barriers through measures such as the sensitive location and delivery of courses, supportive fee remission policies and the fostering of a welcoming and inclusive class atmosphere. The WEA has developed a vigorous training programme for staff and key voluntary members which aims, through a process of awareness raising, to embed the principle of equal opportunity of access to provision across the full range of WEA activities.

Providing Educational Guidance

The WEA believes that if a culture of Lifelong Learning is to be encouraged in Britain, then there must be a universal entitlement to impartial educational guidance. The WEA has developed a framework that provides learners with access to educational guidance at three stages: pre-course, on-course and pre-exit. The WEA's approach to the delivery of educational guidance is learner-centred and is predicated on the assumption that where 'specialist' or 'high level' guidance is required, this can be best achieved through referring individuals to independent and impartial specialist support. In support of this model the WEA keenly anticipates an effective multi-agency free entry model for the delivery of initial educational guidance, within which a clear role is indicated for adult education providers and the voluntary sector.

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Education in Communities

Art for the Visually Impaired

Valuing the Quality of Learning Through the Identification of Learning Outcomes

The Learning Outcomes Strategy developed by the WEA aims to recognise the valuable levels of learning that take place in classes for which formal accreditation is considered by students as inappropriate. The strategy encourages students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. Not only does this lead to more active learning but it places students in a better position to confirm their learning achievements. The WEA learning outcomes approach requires tutors to produce syllabuses which make explicit the proposed learning outcomes of the courses - what students should be able to think, do, feel or say as a result of their newly acquired knowledge and understanding. These outcomes are discussed and agreed by the class and may be modified during the course.

The WEA's approach to Learning Outcomes was highlighted in the recent FEDA publication, *A Sense of Achievement: Outcomes of Adult Learning.*

Developing Progression Routes and Learning Pathways

The WEA believes that effective learning does not happen in isolation, but is a continual process where new information and knowledge builds upon existing understanding. To this end the WEA is developing 'programmes of study' which link courses to allow pathways of learning for students. The conceptual framework is of a matrix which allows students to move between courses irrespective of whether they are defined as 'liberal' or 'targeted' work, 'accredited' or 'non-accredited' provision and avoiding strict 'vertical' definitions of progression. In many cases the development of programmes requires collaboration with partner organisations. Increasingly the WEA works with Trade Unions, Charities, Local Authorities and other education providers to develop and deliver programmes that truly meet the needs of learners. Attention is paid always to the potential for continued study at the end of a course and addresses the issue of 'what next?' so that students can build upon their initial successes and maintain their commitment to learning.

TAKING GROUPS THROUGH BARRIERS

With almost 10,000 courses on offer each year, it is only possible to provide a snapshot of the way in which the WEA is bringing down the barriers to learning throughout the country.

These examples of WEA provision for some of the Fryer categories are by no means comprehensive. But they do demonstrate the varied and imaginative ways in which the WEA has tackled educational disadvantage.

The success of the WEA's approach is a demonstration of what needs to be achieved on a much larger scale if the exciting vision contained within 'The Learning Age' is to be realised.

The key characteristics of the WEA's approach which emerge from the case studies can be summarised as follows:

- a strong base in local communities - in neighbourhoods, inner cities, towns and villages
- effective partnerships with other community-based organisations
- effective links with statutory bodies (education, health, social services, local government, TECs)
- taking provision to the learner - everything the WEA does is on an outreach basis
- flexible and innovative approaches to learning and the evaluation and assessment of learning
- effective involvement of the learners in planning and decision-making about their learning - what they learn, how they learn and where they learn
- recognising and valuing learning of all kinds and at all levels
- increasing use of new technologies to take learning into new areas - whether it be former mining villages, remote rural communities or deprived inner cities.

The WEA is already bringing down the barriers but there is still so much more to be done.

CASE STUDIES

UNISON/WEA RETURN TO LEARN

Target Group

Full and part time working people in the public sector on low incomes and with few qualifications.

Background

From the late 1980s UNISON and the WEA began developing a range of Open College accredited courses.

The publicity and recruitment for these courses is targeted at the lowest paid members of UNISON. Students include hospital ancillary workers, school cleaners, catering staff, local government manual workers and home care workers.

60% of the students had no formal qualifications. Over 90% left school at 16 or earlier. Two-thirds of students are in the 36 to 55 age group. Three-quarters of the students in 1995 earned less than £10,000 a year.

The Approach

The structure and content of the *Return to Learn* (RTL) programme has been designed to overcome barriers to learning. The teaching methods are designed to be especially supportive of individual students. Study groups, day

schools and weekend schools help students to work together and share their experiences and concerns.

Students can work at different levels and obtain credits at different levels - up to Open College Level 3.

The courses concentrate on the sort of skills which people need to benefit from education or training - writing, investigating, analysing, working with figures.

The Outcomes

Well over 3000 students have now been through the *Return To Learn* programme.

The scheme is expanding on the basis of negotiated Employer Partnerships with a whole range of employers in the public sector.

Most important of all, *Return To Learn* has transformed the lives of so many of its students.

Joyce, originally from the Caribbean, had always wanted to be a nurse. Return To Learn was her stepping stone and now she is a qualified nurse.

'I don't know if the lottery would have made me any happier.'

Denise, a domestic assistant:

'I've got more confidence in myself and for all I'm a domestic I don't think that makes me any less important'.'

Margaret, a school meals worker:

'I don't think I would have been able to do what I've done without it. I would never have been able to sit on a committee with university people and argue my point'.

WORKING WITH CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Target Group

Various ethnic and linguistic community groups.

Background

The WEA has developed a wide range of educational programmes for various ethnic and linguistic community groups in different parts of the country.

Some of the programmes are for refugee groups, others are for established ethnic communities.

The programmes are tailored to meet the varying needs of the different groups. In all cases, the WEA works closely with the communities in developing provision and providing appropriate support such as childcare. Highlighted below is just a selection of some of the WEA's work in this area.

The Approach

In **Sheffield** the *Somali Education Project* has run courses on *Counselling, Mental Health, Dressmaking, Computing* and *Childcare*. A number of these courses were accredited through the South Yorkshire Open College.

In **London** and in the **North East**, Community Interpreters' Programmes have been developed to give a voice to those who cannot yet speak in English for themselves. These courses cover a wide range of specialisms - such as mental health, counselling, immigration, racism, welfare rights and community law - as well as developing language and interpreting skills.

In **Brighton** the WEA provides a range of courses with childcare for the Sudanese refugee community - including *ESOL* and *Living in Britain*.

In **Edinburgh**, 'The Peoples of Edinburgh' Multi-Cultural Project, is a community arts celebration of the ethnic diversity of the city. It encompasses personal histories, exhibitions, film, music, dance, drama, story-telling and fashion shows. A major exhibition at the Edinburgh City Arts Centre attracted over 35,000 visitors.

In **Lancashire** a wide range of courses are offered to the Asian community which include a course on Chinese Word-processing.

In **Leicester** the WEA provides courses for ethnic communities particularly targeted at the elderly or those with disabilities.

In the **West Midlands** the WEA offers a programme of *Roots* courses for women from ethnic communities.

In **Southampton** the WEA is developing a major programme for the Black and Asian communities with support from the National Lottery.

These are just some of the many programmes for ethnic community groups in towns and cities throughout Britain.

Working with Families

The Outcomes

WEA programmes for ethnic and cultural communities encompass a variety of outcomes. In some cases - particularly the work with recently-arrived refugees - the aim is to assist with adjusting to life in a new and strange country.

Beyond this, WEA programmes provide skills to go on to further study or employment. Above all, they aim to instil confidence and celebrate Britain's cultural diversity.

WORKING WITH WOMEN

Target Group

Women on low incomes, lone parents.

Background

The WEA has a long track record of provision for women on low incomes and low educational attainment. Most of this work originates in response to local needs but it is also supported by various national initiatives developed by the WEA's Women's Education Committee.

The examples below give some idea of the range of this work.

The Approach

Coley Park is a very poor housing estate in **Reading**. With assistance from the National Lottery, the WEA and the Local Authority are working with groups of mostly single mothers, running drop-in study skills and other courses. The confidence of women participating in the programme is very low, and courses have to be run at a pace and level suitable to their needs. The women themselves are involved in the planning of the course programme.

Another Lottery-supported programme is *New Choices - Women and Health* in

Kent. Most of the women on this programme are referred by the Statutory Agencies (Social Services, Health Trusts, GPs). All are on low incomes and a high proportion are lone parents; some are from the 'Families at Risk' register; some are dependent on prescribed and non-prescribed drugs. Virtually none had any significant learning since leaving school.

Jenny Knight of the South Kent Community Healthcare, NHS, summed up their success:

"*By working with the WEA we were able to access a group of women who would have slipped through the net of existing provision...*"

The 24-week courses are based in community locations (Family Centres, Community Centres, etc.) and are planned with the students. They cover a wide range of health and health-related issues.

The WEA nationally has developed an Open College accredited *Women's Learning Programme* with four core courses: *Confidence Building and Assertiveness; Looking at Women's Lives; Working Together on Maths;* and *Getting Back to Paid Work*.

More and more WEA Districts are offering these courses as part of their regular programmes.

Hundreds of women on **Teesside** have already found their way back into learning with *Wider Options for Women* (WOW). Run in a relaxed atmosphere, by tutors who know exactly what it is like to feel left behind in the world of learning, the sessions are held all over Teesside.

WORKING WITH THE UNEMPLOYED

Target Group

Unemployed Men and Women.

Background

The WEA has a long history of work with unemployed people going back to the depression years between the Wars. Today the WEA's particular strength is in working with unemployed groups and Unemployed Centres up and down the country.

A common feeling amongst many unemployed people is that they are forced to undertake education and training which they think is of little value. It is something being 'done to them'.

The WEA provides unemployed people with a chance to do something for themselves. In many cases they decide upon the course programmes and how they are delivered.

The Approach

The WEA now provides for hundreds of unemployed groups in all parts of the country - in inner cities, on housing estates, in small towns, in former mining villages.

Typically the local WEA staff member or Branch will meet with a group of unemployed people or an established Unemployed Centre to discuss possible programmes. (In some cases Unemployed Centres have been established as a result of WEA courses.)

Once a course programme has been agreed, the WEA will use its own resources, or secure financial assistance from other sources - European Social Fund, Single Regeneration Budget, TECs - to develop the provision.

Working with the Unemployed

The WEA takes the provision to the learners with courses in all sorts of community locations - including Miners' Welfare, CIU clubs, Churches, and neighbourhood centres.

In many cases, portable computers are made available to provide basic IT skills training.

Below are some examples from one part of the country - **Merseyside**. These illustrate the WEA's versatility and its ability to tailor its provision to local needs. The WEA is running a major European Social Fund project for unemployed ex-port workers and their families to give them multi-media skills. Also on Merseyside the WEA offers various *Return to Learn* programmes in areas of high unemployment.

The WEA is involved in the New Deal programme in **Liverpool** particularly in support of the Voluntary Sector Option. This includes a Voluntary Community Educators Programme for unemployed volunteers leading to a City and Guilds 7307 teaching qualification.

The Outcomes

As a community-based organisation, the WEA is now recognised throughout the country as one of the most effective providers of Lifelong Learning opportunities for unemployed people.

In many cases, WEA courses have provided a way back into work. But, of equal importance, they have restored the self esteem of unemployed people and provided much needed social contact and a sense of purpose.

WORKING IN RURAL AREAS

Target Group

People living in rural areas with limited access to learning opportunities.

Background

The WEA has always been effective at 'reaching the parts the others don't' in its educational provision in rural areas.

The Approach

In **Cornwall**, the *Five Villages Project* was developed in partnership with the Cornwall Rural Community Council for the villages of Boscastle, Constantine, St Keverne, St Just and the Lizard.

With support from Local Authorities a WEA staff member was appointed and very soon a network of voluntary WEA Branches and courses were established.

The '*Five Villages*' has now become 'eight' with the addition of new Branches in Hayle, St Dennis and Week St Mary.

Suffolk the WEA has secured a major Lottery grant to develop its provision of Information and Communications Technology-supported *Return to Study* Programmes.

Alongside computer-based learning materials the programme provides a network of voluntary support for new students (using past students as 'mentors') as well as the all important tutor contact and periodic group meetings.

In **Cumbria** the Community Education Branch based in Penrith is supported by a service level agreement grant from the County Council to provide a range of courses including basic computer skills, *Preparing for Work and Volunteering, Health and Safety at Work, Health Lifestyles and Training for Community Health Activists.*

In **Yorkshire** the Training on Wheels project, initially funded by the European Social Fund, has taken Computer skills courses to such places as Reeth, Richmond, Helmsley, Kirbymoorside, Selby and the Dales, using laptop computers.

Working with Ethnic Communities

The Outcomes

Many of the 650 WEA Branches are located in small towns and villages where alternative Lifelong Learning opportunities are few and far between. The WEA is now using distance learning techniques and ICT to further enhance its provision in rural locations.

HELPING IN SCHOOLS

Target Group

Parents of young children who wish to help in the classroom.

Background

Helping in Schools was developed in **Yorkshire** to introduce parents with young children to the workings of a primary school and its curriculum - particularly the core subjects of English and mathematics.

In 1996/97 nearly 600 students in **North Yorkshire** alone successfully completed the programme, the vast majority of whom took the opportunity to gain an Open College qualification in recognition of their learning achievement.

Because the WEA is both a local and national organisation, *Helping in Schools* is now being offered in various other parts of the country and looks set to become a national programme.

The Approach

Helping in Schools is based on a ten-weeks course programme which looks at such themes as - How a school works, the National Curriculum, learning to read and write, mathematics and Special Educational Needs.

It also looks at school governing bodies and many students become active as school governors as a result of the course.

The course also provides for the personal development of the parent and many students go on to further study. It is, in effect a *Return to Learn* course by another name.

The Outcomes

As an Open College accredited programme the courses are externally moderated. One of the Course Moderators (a Senior Lecturer in Education) described the outcomes in his report:

"It is remarkable how the students increase in confidence over the ten weeks of the course, which is often their first experience of education for many years. They are clear about the benefits to them of increased knowledge, skills and awareness..."

WORK FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OR LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Target Group

Those people for whom access to learning has been made difficult by physical disabilities or learning difficulties.

Background

The WEA has a well established track record of providing for people for whom learning opportunities have been limited because of their physical disabilities or learning difficulties.

This has been given an even sharper focus by the WEA's national *Equal Opportunities* and *Access Project*.

WEA/MIND Group - Working in Partnerships

Most of this work has come about as the result of the WEA's strong base in the local community. The WEA has been particularly effective in filling the gaps left by the statutory services. Also, being a voluntary body itself, the WEA works especially well with the many other voluntary bodies catering specifically for those with disabilities and learning difficulties.

The following are just a few of the many ways in which the WEA has responded to this challenge.

The Approach

The WEA's **Canterbury** Branch received a letter from the then Mayor some fifteen years ago appealing for funds to support a large Residential Home and day care centre for people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties just outside the city. Rather than send a few pounds, the Branch said they would see if they could put on some classes. This has resulted in a long and fruitful partnership with courses at the Home on everything from basic education to music and natural history.

The WEA in **Dudley** has secured a specific grant from the Local Authority to develop its provision in the Borough for people with disabilities. In 1996/97 188 disabled students in Dudley were enrolled on courses in seven different centres. Courses included *Arts and Crafts*, *Drama*, *Photography* and *Life Skills*.

The WEA produced a major study in 1997 on *Visually Impaired Students* which was published by the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) which demonstrated the range of WEA provision for the visually impaired including a modular liberal studies programme in **Leicester** organised jointly with a local society for blind people, residential courses organised with the Staffordshire Association for the Welfare of the Blind near **Stoke-on-Trent**, and Literature courses offered by the **Leeds** WEA Branch. In **Bristol** the WEA secured a three-years grant from the Phoenix NHS Trust to provide a package of day services for a number of students who had experienced various forms of visual impairment including tunnel vision.

Other WEA provision has been developed specifically for people with learning difficulties. The WEA's 101 Hinckley Road Centre in **Leicester** liaises with over 30 different organisations to mount a wide ranging programme. The 'Off to Work' programme in Bradford is specifically for young unemployed people with learning difficulties.

The *DART* and *Homelink Project* in **Sheffield** provides access to computer technology for people with disabilities. *Homelink* works with students with more severe disabilities - often in their own homes. Both schemes offer Open College accreditation on a range of courses including *Desk Top Publishing* and the *Internet*.

The Outcomes

The kinds of targeted provision described above provide for students whose learning needs and interests would not otherwise have been met. Many achieve formal recognition of their learning for the first time in their lives.

Thousands more registered disabled people also attend general WEA courses in the usual way. In all cases, WEA courses enable the students to focus on what they can do - their abilities rather than their disabilities.

Special Needs Programmes

Affiliations

The WEA is a member organisation of:

ADSET
CEA (Council for Educational Advance)
DEA (Development Education Association)
IBT (International Broadcasting Trust)
Local Authorities Women's Network
NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)
NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)

EU-IRIS (Women's Training Network)
IFWEA (International Federation of Workers' Education Associations)
EURO-WEA (the European Regional Organisation of IFWEA)

28 national organisations, with an interest in adult and workers' education, are affiliated to the WEA at national level:

Banking, Insurance & Finance Union
Ceramic and Allied Trades Union
Communication Managers Association
Co-operative Union Limited
Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd
Fircroft College of Adult Education
Fire Brigades Union
General Federation of Trade Unions
GMB
Graphical Paper & Media Union
Iron & Steel Trades Confederation,
Manufacturing Science Finance
Musicians' Union
National Association of Schoolmasters, Union of Women Teachers
National Union of Insurance Workers
National Union of Journalists
National Union of Knitwear, Footwear & Apparel Trades
National Union of Marine Aviation & Shipping Transport Officers
National Union of Teachers
Pre-School Learning Alliance
Public and Commercial Services Union
Ruskin College
Society of Telecom Executives
Trades Union Congress
Transport and General Workers' Union
Transport Salaried Staffs' Association
UNISON
Union of Shop Distributive & Allied Workers

At District level, a wide range of regional and local organisations are affiliated to the WEA.

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The Workers' Educational Association exists primarily to provide adults with access to experience of organised learning which develops intellectual understanding, confidence and social and collective responsibility. Particular features of its approach to the provision of learning opportunities for adults include:

Valuing and making use of students' life experience

•

Involving students in organising provision and planning their own learning

•

Targeting students who have benefited least from the education system and from opportunities for further and higher education

•

Collaborating with other organisations and agencies to meet the needs of adult learners for educational guidance, equal access to provision, and for relevant, progressive and accredited learning opportunities

•

Offering high quality learning experiences underpinned by regular monitoring and evaluation of the programme

•

Providing staff development opportunities for professional staff and training for voluntary members

•

Promoting and supporting the voluntary movement by which the Association governs itself and decides its future strategy

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